

Teacher Resource

Historical dance includes many dance forms such as folk, social, court dances or cultural dances from different historical periods from the past. The following information provides you with some dance choices to consider for this lesson plan. Many sources present different dances and dance forms under a variety of dance types.

Folk dances throughout the centuries have celebrated cultures and countries from across the world. Teaching Note: Folk dance videos and instruction with music are easy web searches.

American traditional dances provide a wealth of folk, contra, square, line, and social dances. These dances showcase the many people who brought their heritage and dances when they came to the United States. Some dances from other countries continue to be performed near to their original forms, such as English Country dances or Playford dances. As pioneers moved westward, many of the dances brought to the United States often became blended with other dances from people of other nationalities which become American traditional dances.

Teaching Note: American traditional dance videos and instruction with music are easy web searches.

Social dances began as community dances with some moving to medieval and later courts and then to the ballroom. Historical social dances are often for groups, several couples, or a single couple. During the 19th century, social couple dances expanded. While 20th century traditional social dances increased with the infusion of African American dances, Latin dances and fad dances during different 20th century decades.

Court Dances beginning in the 15th century through the 18th century offer a wide variety of dances for groups or a chain of three or four people, trios or couples. Court dances begin and end with honors or bows and curtsies to the nobility and then your partner. The honors for the Basse Dance (15th and 16th centuries) are an example of this period. Other periods have different honors.

Basse dance (15th and 16th centuries)

The Basse dance can be either a couple dance or a chain of three or four people. Until the 16th century the Basse dance was never crystalized. It remained a series of steps. So, the dance can be done in a wide variety of ways.

Honors: The honors are performed before the music begins.

The man holds his partner's left hand in his right and, facing the nobleman at the head of the hall and other onlookers.

First, the couple makes a bow or curtsy (honors) to the nobleman. Then the couple turn toward each other on an angle; they bow and curtsy to each other before they start the dance.

Early bow and curtsy (end of 15th century and whole of the 16th century)

Bow: Slide one foot back leaving the weight on the front foot, both knees are bent, the heel is off the ground, without turn-out. The body tilts forward slightly, the hat removed and brought down to his left side. Bring the back foot forward again to other foot and replace the hat.

Curtsy: Slide one foot back, drooping weight to back heel. The head is up; hands are by the sides. On rising, the back foot moves forward to the front foot. The essence of the movement is simplicity.

Then the male dancer extends his right hand to the female dancer. She places her left hand on top of his hand. Or the dancers can hold fingertips, handkerchiefs, or not hold hands.

The Basse dance is a walking dance for couples.

The formation is a line of couples or a chain of couples.

The dancers move down the hall toward the nobility seated at the front of the hall.

At the close of the dance there should be a final chord, prolonged while you and your partner perform a *reverence** toward each other. Then turning toward the assemble, you both make a bow or curtsy. The lady may perform her *reverence*.

Then the male dancer leads his partner to her seat

*reverence: a bow to the lady at the end of the basse dance.

*conge or farewell. The male dancer bows to her and keeps hold of her hand while returning to the starting place for the dance or to her seat.

Teaching Note: Many court dance videos with music are available through a web search.